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Indian Painting
a romance

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USHA PRASAD

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DELHI

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CONTENTS

Page

Dedication 7

Foreword 9

Acknowledgements 11

A Personal Note 13

List of illustrations 15

Plates 17

I The Opening 29

II The Features 31

III The Rock-cut Caves 36

IV The Revivalists 39

V The Stylists 45

VI The Future 51

Short Bibliography 56

Index 61

Dedicated to the loving memory
of my father

FOREWORD

Mrs. Usha Prasad, herself an artist and connoisseur of art, has given her valuable appraisal of Indian art, its early traditions, its continuity during the several centuries of growth and efflorescence, and the meaning of its present phase, which has a rare sensitivity and vitality born of its own inherent great aesthetic quality and its link with the past that cannot be altogether denied. Her treatment is delicate and sensitive as is to be expected from the pen of an artist, connoisseurship most pleasing and objective, a rare quality in one herself an artist evaluating the achievements of a galaxy of distinguished colleagues in Modern art.

The book offers pleasant reading, provokes thought and gives a sense of satisfaction after completion of its perusal. I am sure this book will be welcomed and read by all lovers of Indian art.

C. Sivaramamurti

New Delhi
December 8, 1976

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Jacket cover design and painting "Durga", Goddess of Destruction, by Nandalal Bose—courtesy E. Kumaril Swamy.

Finally, I am grateful to my mother, brothers, sisters-in-law and my sons Ashwani and Anil.

A PERSONAL NOTE

This book is an attempt at introducing Indian painters and their creativity: a presentation dedicated to the cause and enrichment of Art. To me Art is that form of creativity, which lives and breathes in an atmosphere devoid of all restraining elements: and at the same time expresses the artist's message in a language unknown to the tongue. The body and soul of the artist will invariably be tuned to the audience, communicating all that is seen, heard or spoken by the artist. The quality of a great work of art is the quality of our response to it. If we manage to excite a similar response to an object which is not made to elicit it, we are cheating ourselves or else being cheated. And Arts are the products of specific human societies; their subject matter is therefore influenced by the prevailing ethos.

India's painting romance abounds in a rich and glorious past with an equally contrasting and dynamic art of today. It is here that man's joys and sorrows are woven, or knitted together in silence. My main aim in writing this book is to acquaint our readers with the 'silent pillars of our society' - the artists: whose works speak for themselves, while they stand dumb. In so doing, I have revealed an entirely new line of action, which had remained unexplored, unknown and unrealised in today's busy world. The description of the artist's works are purely philosophical: the only guideline for me being my intuition as a painter. In this world of creativity, diversity in styles, but oneness of emotional expression, I am with the artist in sharing his many joys and sorrows, restlessness and awareness, organisation and discipline; in his search for that world of imagination and phantasy where eternal bliss prevails. What is bliss for an artist except his own creation? This in turn becomes the source of all life, the satiation of all thirst, and the end of all intangible ends. In this book are listed some of those modern painters, whose works are still under the influence of our heritage: or in other words, they have a romantic link with the glory of the past.

Modern Indian art has been a slow process of growth, or a continuous patterned evolution. Our modern artists have broken all traditions, rules and styles to develop a creativity of their own. They have explored new techniques and new materials and their feelings have been expressed freely. An artist living in an age creates for posterity; thus leaving in his expressive works, an imprint of the time he lived and breathed. And truly, an artist of today is tomorrow's heritage, ushering in the radiance of dawn.

USHA PRASAD

New Delhi,
November, 14, 1976

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Plate 1

E. Kumaril Swamy,
'Buddha—the compassionate'
Water colour,
Courtesy—Artist

Plate 2

Narendra Srivastava,
'Humanity',
Oil on canvas,
Courtesy—Artist

Plate 3

J. Sultan Ali,
'Radhika'
Pen and Ink Drawing,
Courtesy—Artist

Plate 4

Nose was drawn similar to the beak of an Indian parrot

Plate 5

Eyebrows were drawn resembling the stylised 'two leaves and a bud'

Plate 6

Eyes expressed the shape of a fish

Plate 7

Lip resembled the light pink flower petal

Plate 8

Woman's legs were depicted as shapely as the outline of a fish

Plate 9

Woman's thigh was conceived as the stalk of the banana plant

Plate 10

Woman's hip resembled an elephant's trunk

Plate 11

The fingers of the feet were like the beautiful petals of lotus

Plate 12

Woman's waist (like the figure of eight) was derived from the curve of the 'Damru'. This Indian musical beat instrument was associated with Lord Shiva

Plates 13 and 14

Fingers of the hands resembled the shapely legumes

Plate 15

Man's body resembled the majestic form of a lion

Plate 16

E. Kumaril Swamy,
(after Ajanta Caves),
Line Drawing

Plate 17

M.F. Husain,
'Monkey God',
Oil on canvas,
Courtesy—Artist
Collection -Lalit Kala Akademi

Plate 18

Nandalal Bose
"Durga" (Goddess of destruction)
Water Colour
Courtesy—E. Kumaril Swamy

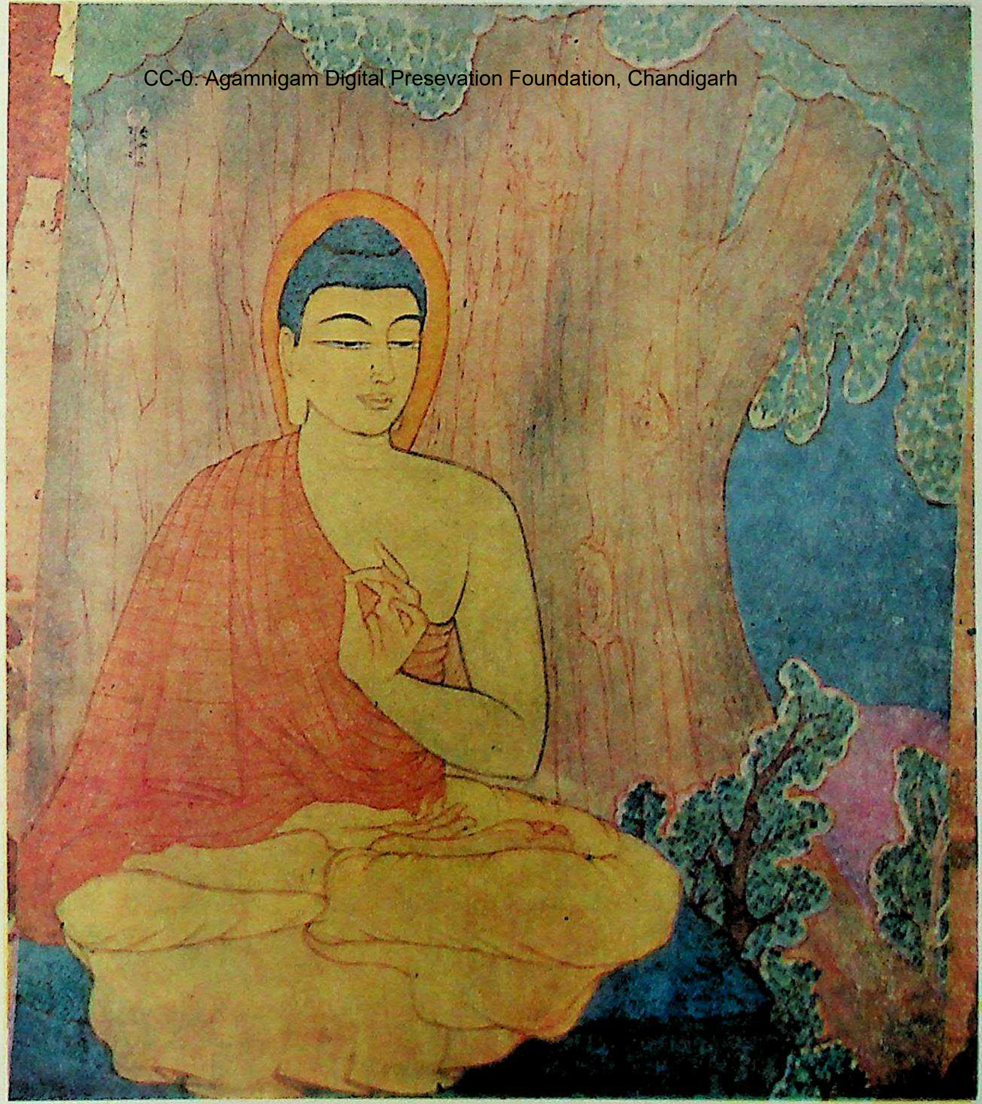

Plate 1 E. Kumaril Swamy,
'Buddha – the compassionate'

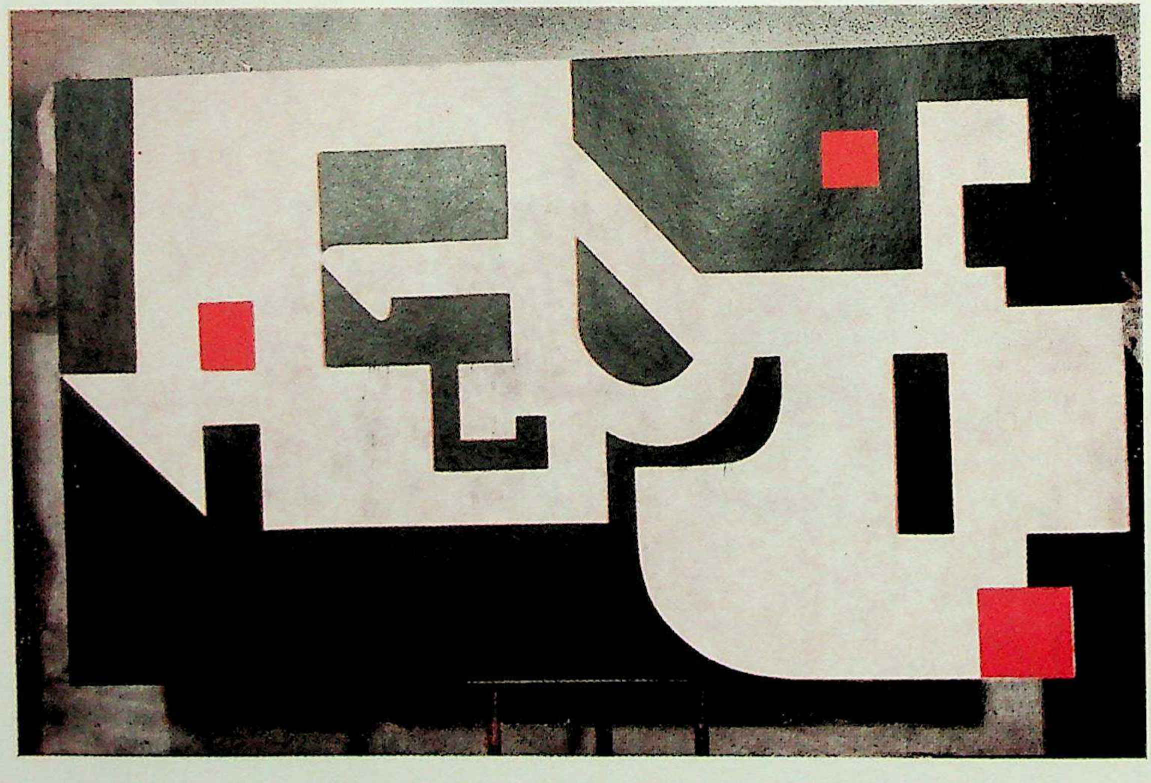

Plate 2 Narendra Srivastava,
'Humanity',

CC-0. Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation, Chandigarh

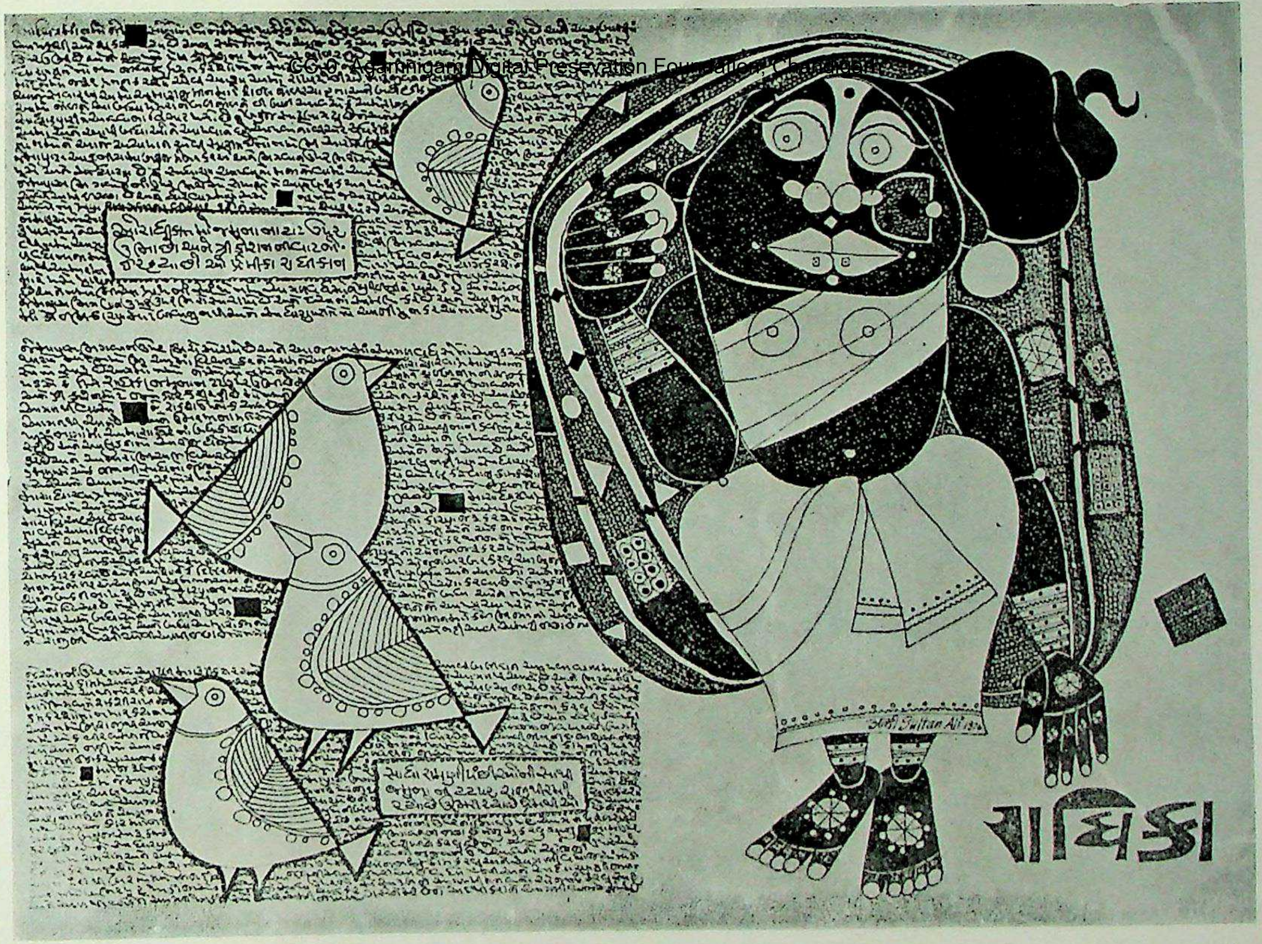
J. Sultan Ali
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Plate 3 J. Sultan Ali,
'Radhika'

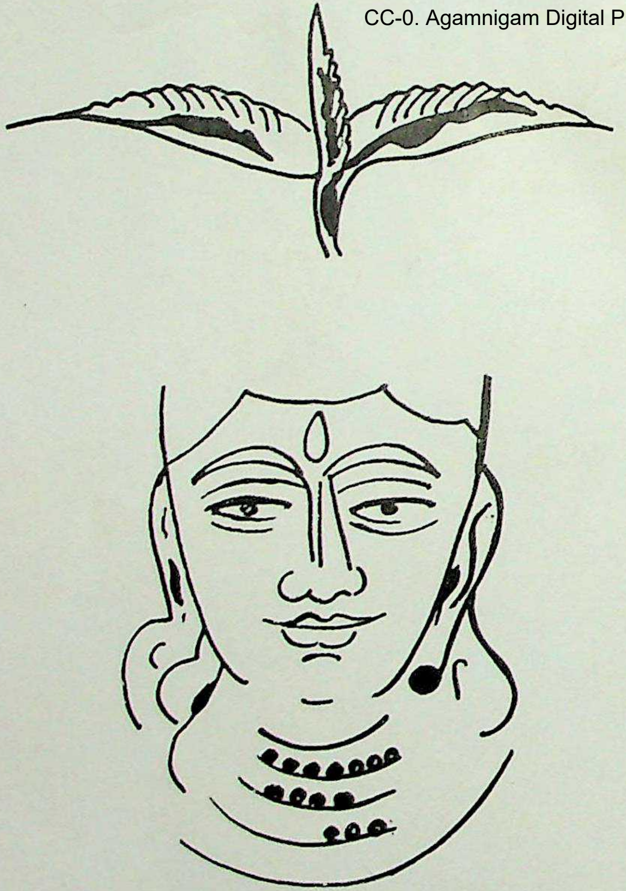

Plate 5 Eyebrows were drawn resembling the stylised 'two leaves and a bud'

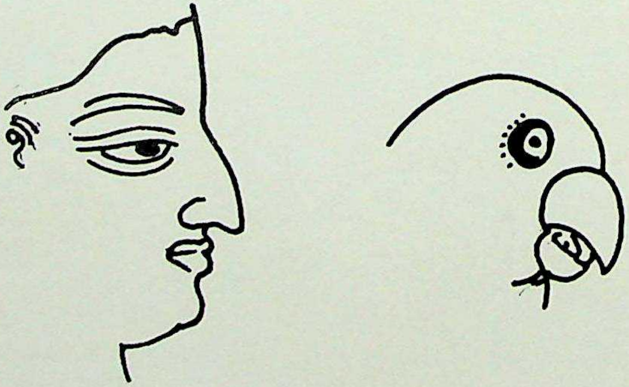

Plate 4 Nose was drawn similar to the beak of an Indian parrot

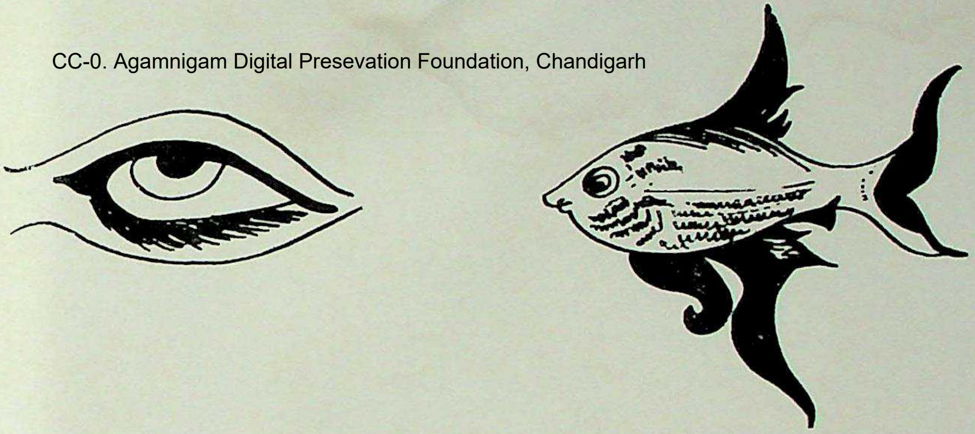

Plate 6 Eyes expressed the shape of a fish

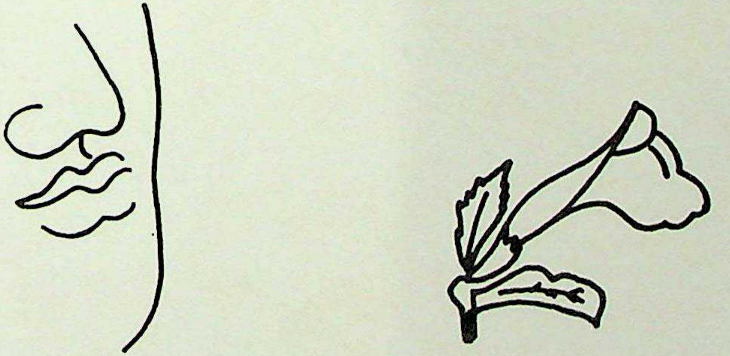

Plate 7 Lip resembled the light pink flower petal

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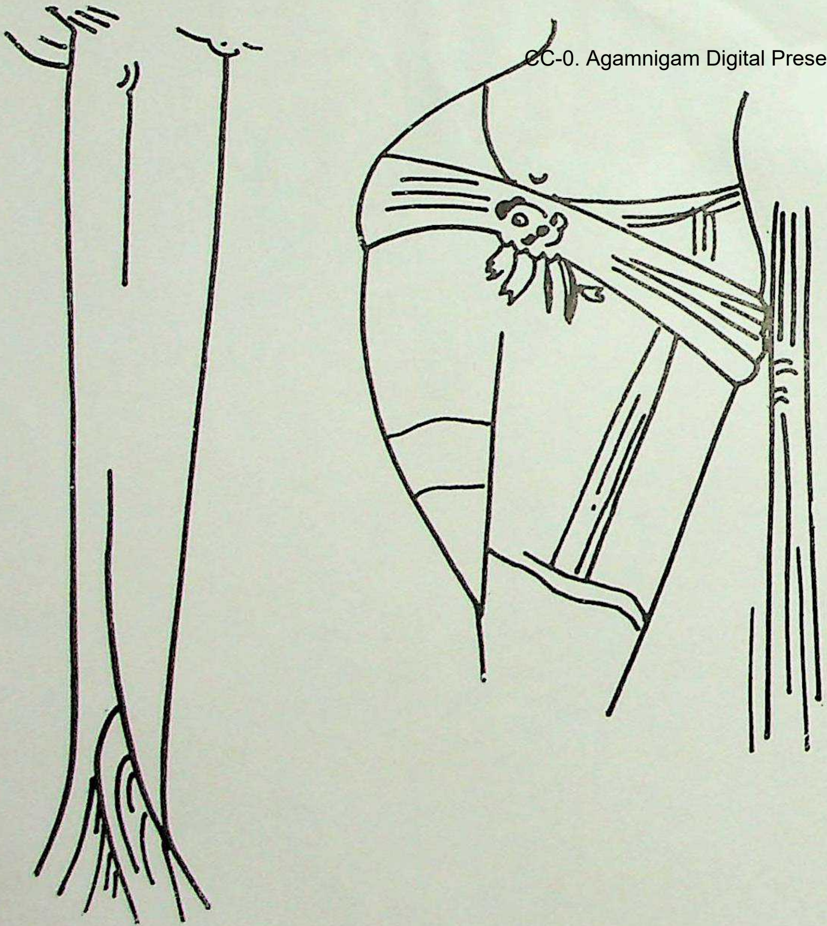

Plate 9 Woman's thigh was conceived as the stalk of the banana plant.

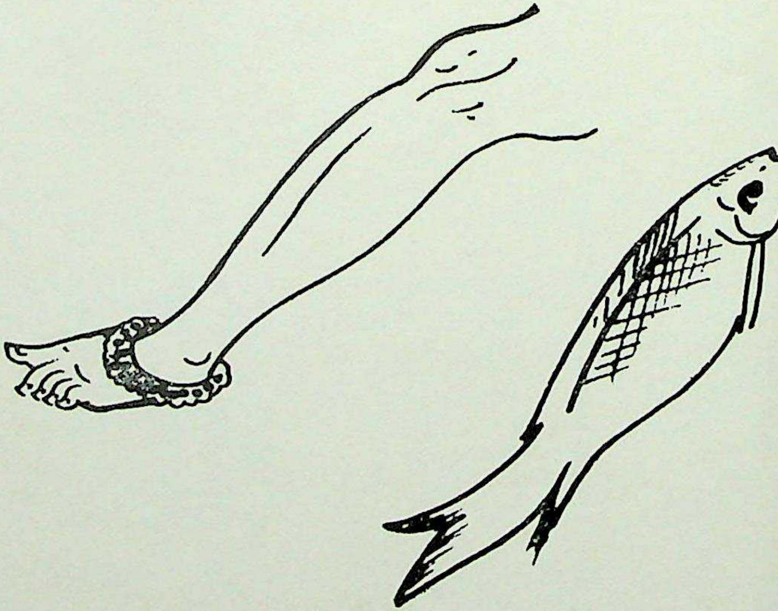

Plate 8 Woman's legs were depicted as shapely as the outline of a fish

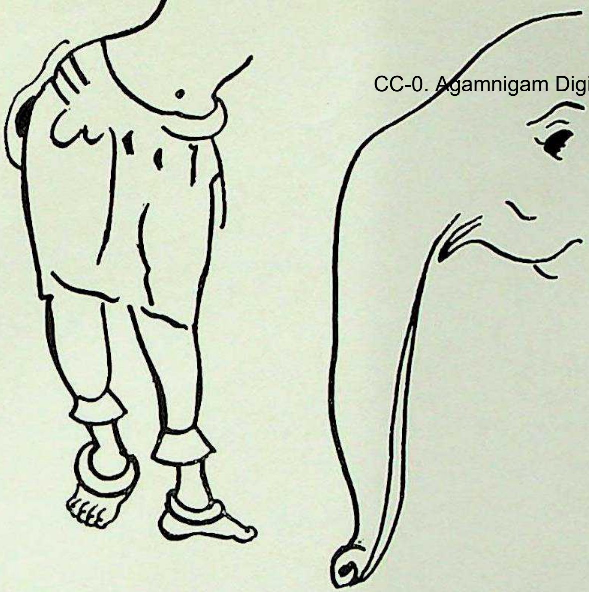

Plate 10 Woman's hip resembled an elephant's trunk

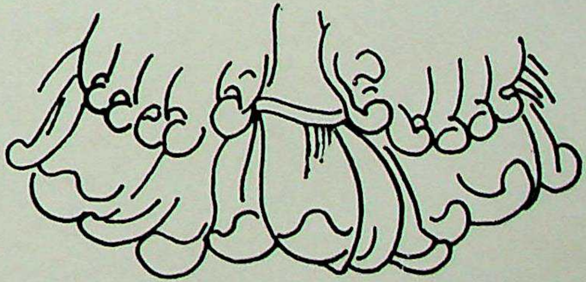

Plate 11 The fingers of the feet were like the beautiful petals of lotus

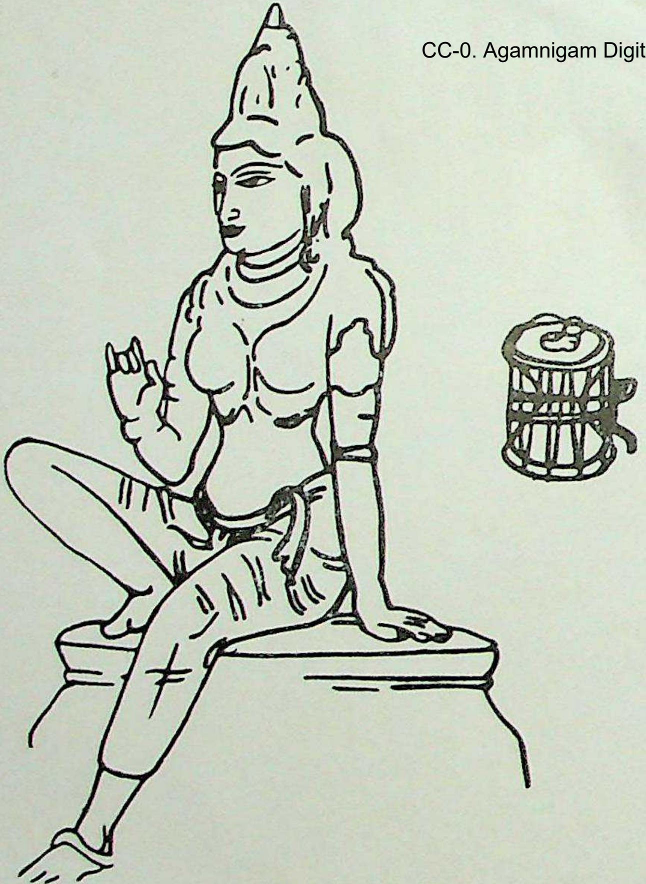

Plate 12 Woman's waist (like the figure of eight) was derived from the curve of the 'Damru'.

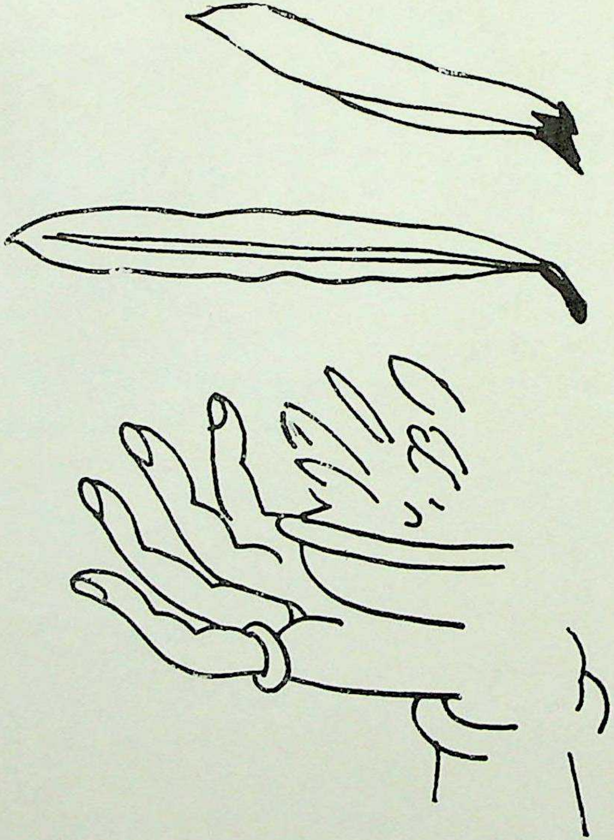

Plate 13 Fingers of the hands resembled the shapely legumes.

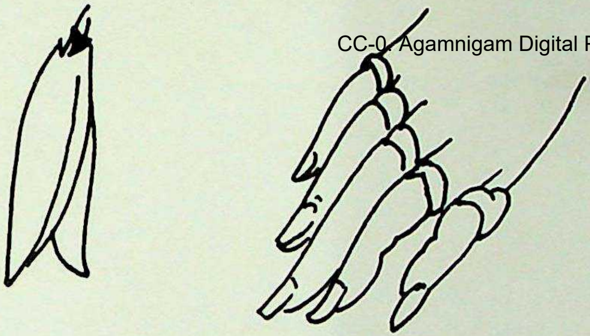

Plate 14 Fingers of the hands resembled the shapely legumes.

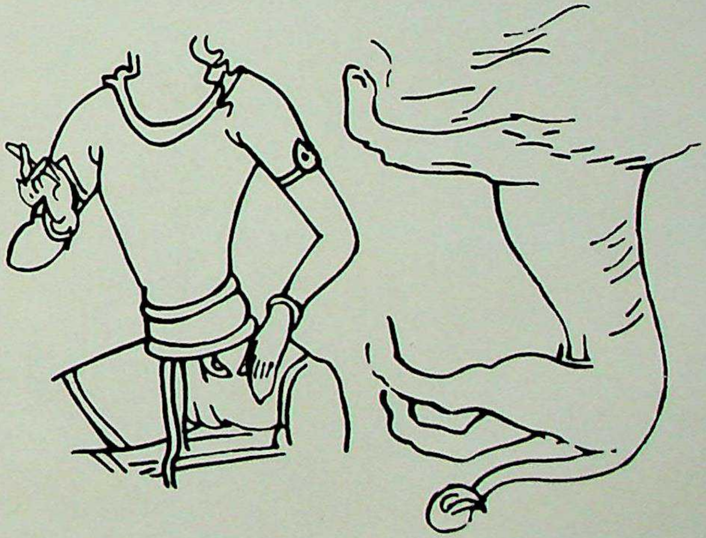

Plate 15 Man's body resembled the majestic form of a lion

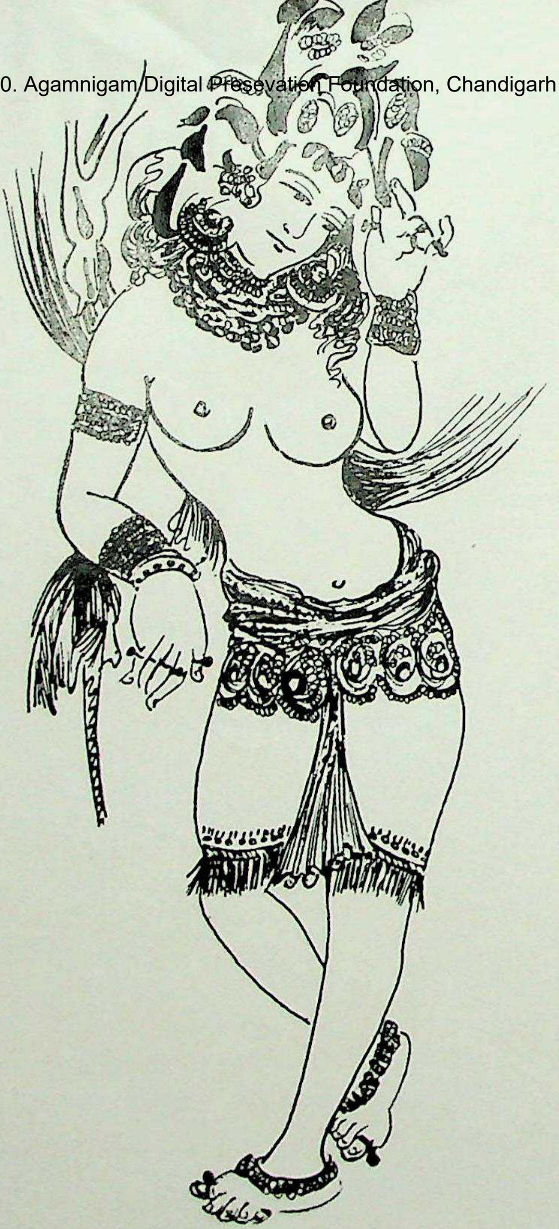

Plate 16 E. Kumaril Swamy,
(after Ajanta Caves),

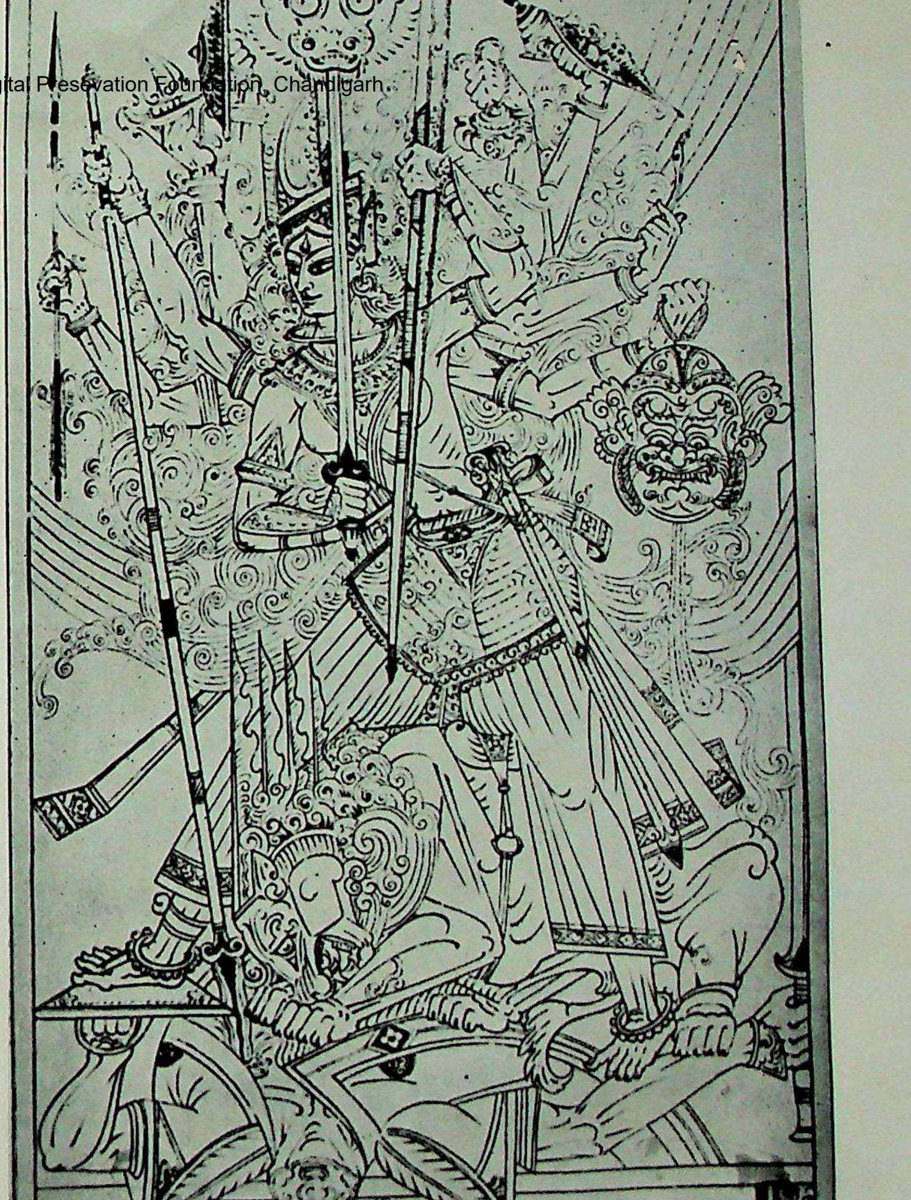

Plate 18 Nandalal Bose
"Durga"
(Goddess of destruction)

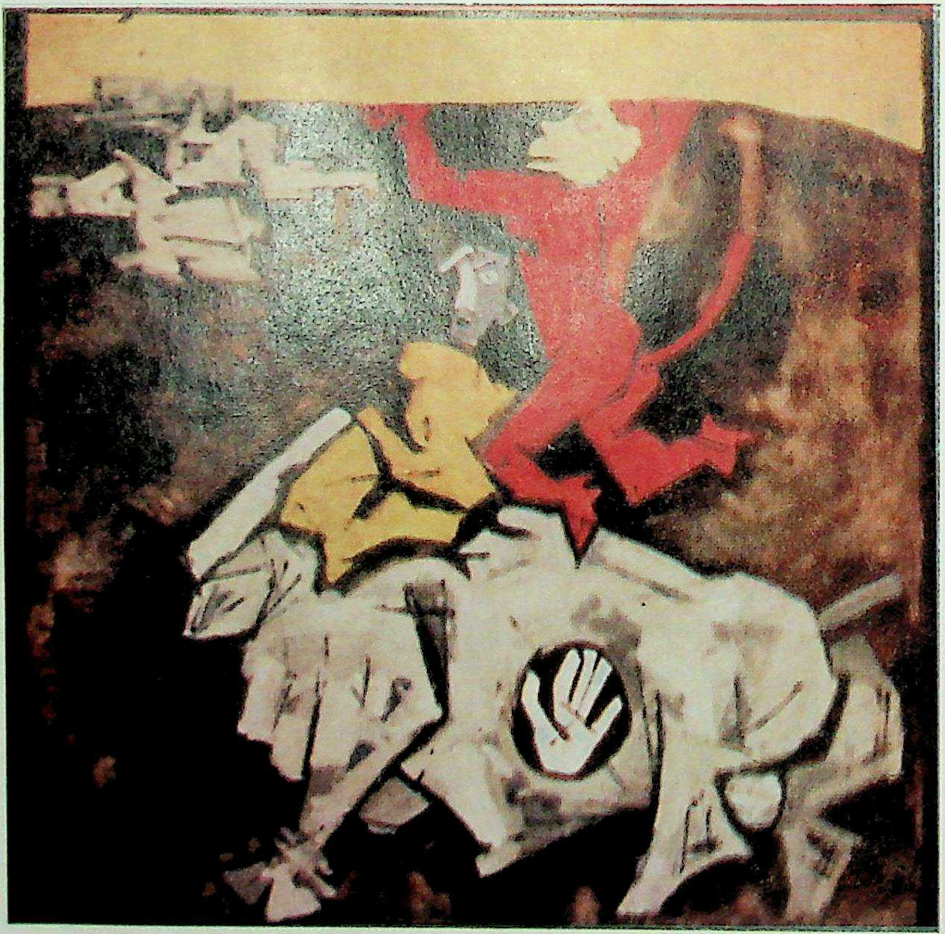

Plate 17 M.F. Husain,
'Monkey God',

I

THE OPENING

The central theme of this book was selected with great concern. Paintings suffer from a handicap - they do not possess a language with which to exchange ideas with their audience. Man explores his surroundings, trying to make his own mark on the world around him; but invariably, he goes back to the shelter of his historical past. The artist also, consciously or unconsciously, is bound to reflect and comment on his personal experience; in respect to the kind of community he lives in, or the way people think or act. Just as the present has been affected by the past, similarly our future will be influenced by the present creativity.

The aim and purpose of this book is not to write the history of Indian art, but to introduce the philosophy of modern Indian painting with its deep-set roots and romantic linkage to the 2,000 years old rock-cut Ajanta caves. "Art represents the inexhaustible magnificence of our creative spirit," Rabindra Nath Tagore had once said, "it is generous in its acceptance and generous in its bestowal; it is unique in its manner and universal in its appeal, it is hospitable to All because it has the wealth which is its own: its vision is new though its view may be old."*

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*Tagore, Rabindra Nath. On Art and Aesthetics.
Orient Longmans, New Delhi 1961, page 62.

Today, artists painting in the modern theme use abstraction as a means of expression: or minimise forms and colours in trying to reduce the components of art, so as to express the maximum with the minimum. The objective is to conceive a mental image rather than a visual image. It is this practice which is leading the artists to explore and experiment with the depths of human mind, practising the hitherto unnoticed forms of Ajanta, in a melodious tune of their colourful paintings. Like young birds learning to fly, their wings flutter in many directions and their efforts yield excellent results. The machine age brought in many promises, but no movement is flawless and ultimately man becomes dissatisfied with the present.

Abandoning the formal, the artists searched for symbols to recreate faith within the enlarged circumstances of this new awareness; through which the needs of the age make themselves felt, before they are formulated. Man also aspires for freedom, freedom from all outward and inward bondage - but seeks shelter in the caves of our heritage. Modern Indian artists have realised complete freedom in their expressions: but they have not forgotten the caves of Ajanta; nor have their love ties been broken. These caves have inspired artists for many generations: and modern Indian painting is a silent growth, or a blossom of the seeds sown by the Buddhist cave painters. As we turn the pages of this book, facts will be revealed, similarities will be seen, and the readers will have the liberty to voice their opinions either in consonance or dissonance. But the romance of Ajanta cave paintings will silently enter their thoughts; this will help in projecting some of the views held by our ancestors. I hope this book will also prove to be a humble contribution from me to the progress of mankind, where every single step has brought us nearer to man's search of himself.

II

THE FEATURES

A good painting conveys more than just a photograph, since the latter is confined to the physical depiction only, while the painting is an outlet for the inner spiritual visions of the artist. The great Italian artist, Leonardo da Vinci once said, "Painting is poetry that is seen," and indeed the main aim of painting, like that of poetry is to arouse our emotions. The painter maintains that the viewer should no longer be placed in front of the painting, but inside it. The canvas and the viewer should share the same indivisible space and participate fully in the painter's work.

"Earth is the primordial mother of life; she feeds all creatures out of her substance, and again devours all; she is the common grave. She clasps to her bosom the life she has brought forth, denying to it the unbound freedom of celestial space."*

Such being the transient nature of the philosophy of life, the artist is aware of the ever-changing world around him. But he is bound by his inner urge to create, independent of such changes. The stars may shine and become invisible at sunrise; rivers may flow or over-flow; flowers may bloom and fade away, as spring comes and goes, but the artist is always restless unless his inner expressions have

*Zimmer, Heinrich. Myths and Symbols of Indian Art and Civilization. (Harper and Torchbook) New York, 1962, page 75.

been realised in his creations, and have found an identity with his mental perception.

Every nation has produced works of art with a particular self-expression. Indian art, too, possesses all these features of accepted art, but is characterised by certain typical features. The love of nature and the value of spiritual concepts have played an important role.

"Indian Art neither depicts iconographic themes or mythical motives, nor does it illustrate allegories. It creates the coherent form of an empowered image in which the transubstantiated i.e., subtle body of man is coalesced with the shape of the animal, in which the figure of woman conceived in proportions of the Mother goddess - is entwined with a tree. The shape of the woman and that of the tree remain distinct. Yet they are assimilated to one another, the arms resembling the stem of tree or creeper, the curves of the stem borrowed from those of the woman's body, both swaying in a co-ordinated rhythm, punctuated by shapes of flowers, garments and ornaments, joints of the woman's body, and modules of the plant."[1]... Life in Indian philosophy with man as part of nature, is identified with life of the physical universe. For instance, Indian artists realised the human face like an oval; the eyebrows were drawn in the curve of a bow or like the stylised forms of "two leaves and a bud"; the eyes were expressed as the eyes of a gazelle, or the form of a fish; the neck resembled the neck of a goose; the thigh was drawn resembling the elephant's trunk and hands represented the stalk of a lotus. Indian painters surrounded with forms of nature revealed an idealism, which was derived from the natural flow of life.[2] Seldom do we see straight lines in nature: the continuity of

1. Kramrisch, Stella. Indian Sculpture. Oxford University Press, 1960, London, page 15.
2. Refer Plates 4 to 15.

life in nature is depicted through curved lines. (These curved lines bridge the gap between man and nature signifying their unison and seeking an inspiration to realise the Almighty; this is concerned as the ultimate goal of life in India and therefore the Indian artist's works too abound with curved lines.)

The literary forms depicted by the poet found an echo in the artist's world, their works depicting the same grace and lyricism. It was observed that generally the feminine figure was drawn bent on the right side, so that the weight of her breasts fell on the left side, while the weight of her hips was supported on the sides by the feet. The male figure was drawn in the opposite manner; and the figures were drawn mainly in the curvilineal style rather than the rectilineal form.[3] The world of nature is romantically knit with our lives; man is related to the universe - whatever is in nature is in man. The plastic and pictorial art of India has always portrayed man as surrounded with various objects of nature.

Another prominent characteristic of Indian art was its emphasis on the personality or true self of the human being, not on the outward appearance. Unlike the Greeks who idealised all that was beautiful in the human body, and considered the harmony and symmetry of the different parts of the body, together with its rhythm as the most important requirement of beauty; the Indian artist did not wish to express the transitory feature in his object of presentation, but laid special emphasis on the universal and eternal characteristics of man. The artist by his intuition together with a deep concentration, tried to express the dominant character of the person, rather than the fleeting expression of the individual; which may run through momentary changes. The artist was in position to give it a visual presentation having realised the original form through his intuition. And true resemblance can by no means convey physical similarities - but the inner characterisation as revealed differently by different artists.

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[3] Refer Plates 16.

The paintings at Ajanta justify this special romantic interlude of the Indian artists; while representing a king, a queen, a lady-in-love with her companions, a trader, or a merchant - the artist had concentrated upon the characters of these personalities as the 'royal majesty', the 'lovelorness', the 'shrewdness', ignoring all anatomical aspects. However, "We should not get carried away by thinking that Indian artists have been ignorant of human anatomy; because records have shown that Susruta (as early as 700 B.C.) had described in complete detail the human body as revealed in actual dissection."[1]

As far as painting Gods was concerned, the Indian artist gave emphasis to a spiritual message, that the forms of various Gods and Goddesses were intended to impart. On seeing a figure with many hands,[2] heads or eyes, we at once associate them with superhuman or supernatural powers and vision. Their looks are of the human figure, no doubt, but drawn in a manner unlike any other ordinary human being; the forms expressing the pulsating inner life of the soul in its varied revelations. In a painting of the Buddha, the Enlightened One, or Vishnu, the Protector, our attention is not drawn to their muscles or bones, but to the overpowering, radiant beaming beauty, steeped in the serenity of eternal calm and venerated by the entire world as the 'Highest Being'[3]. Thus, in a way, the depiction

1. Dasgupta, S.N. Fundamentals of Indian Art.
   Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay 1954, page 27.
2. Refer Goddess Durga on jacket cover by Nandalal Bose.
3. Highest Being - "Vishnu the Absolute, the all-containing Divine Essence. He comprises all dichotomies. The Absolute becomes differentiated in polarised manifestations, and through these the vital tensions of the world - processes are brought into existence and maintained."

of deities by the artist is an adoration to the supreme beings.

"Adoration to Vishnu with his myriads of forms and of arms, his manifold faces and feet; adoration to the Infinite One, who is simultaneously the manifestation, the preservation and the dissolution of the Universe"[4]. Although, nature stood as an ideal for the Indian artist, but in the plastic representation of deities, the form was realised through meditative intuition. By this process of delineation, the artist was able to give the expression the same personality and emotion, which was intuited by his mind. This intuition is of the nature of meditation, in which the artist melts his personality in the emotive vision, which may be a spiritual idea, or a physical form.

A romantic language was created by the artist, where nature was the excitant and aroused artistic intuition—regardless of the realities of the material world. Even portrait painting was in vogue in ancient India, but seldom painted from a live model.

The pre-occupation of the Indian artists with the essence rather than the appearance of the subject, shows that they are concerned with the truth, but of a different nature. The play of light and shade is not much adhered to by the Indian artist; the presentation is of spiritual rather than of material appetites. These are some of the special features of Indian paintings, which have remained true in their essence; though the techniques and means of expression have undergone considerable changes. After all a developing society advocates change, while a static condition is suggestive of disease and decadence. And so Indian paintings with their various styles and expressions have moved on. But they have not left their romantic linkage with the Ajanta cave paintings.

4. Zimmer, Heinrich. Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization (Harper and Torchbook) New York, 1962, page 76.

III

THE ROCK-CUT CAVES

Indian treasures are scattered all over the country, they are wide-spread and gargantuan as the lofty Himalayas, standing as nature's citadel against all possible dangers from outside; but carrying with them our thoughts and whispering the many unfulfilled desires (which have lapsed as time has passed). Some of onr wealth remains in the Ajanta caves, which have outlived generations of humanity. These caves are our heritage, and occupy the same position with regard to the future development of Buddhist art in Asia, as do the marbles of the Parthenon for the history of Western Art.

The classical modes represented in the many murals of Ajanta caves have influenced Buddhist paintings in Tibet, Nepal, Central Asia, China and Japan. The subjects of these paintings have been chosen from the Jatakas*—reminiscences of the many legends of Buddha's re-incaranations. It is believed that Buddha in his previous incarnations spent his life with nature, pulsating with the energy of life in ancient India. Here princes, courtiers, masters and servants, are all represented in a play of adventure, excitement, joys and sorrows. Yet art is not just the depiction of human forms, enacting life's drama in its many facets, but an analysis of the realities and unrealities of this world, where the attainment of Nirvana (with the help of the great Deliverer, the Boddhisattva, who would relieve humanity from the sufferings of re-birth and open the path of eternal peace or Nirvana) is the only reality, everything else around us being delusive and transitory.

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*Jatakas:" ... legendry accounts of Buddha's former lives in which, by the performance of good deeds or the suffering of martyrdom, Sakyamuni acquired that store of virtue and merit that enabled him to achieve Buddhahood in his final incarnation", Benjamin Rowland. The Ajanta Caves, Collins UNESCO, 1954-63, page 6.

Like a classical painting the Boddhisattva may be regarded as the Mona Lisa of Indian painting, and the forms reveal the inner expressions of the soul. Ananda Coomaraswamy mentions the predominant expressive quality of the Boddhisattva, "Of all these, the great Boddhisattva (to judge from the blue lotus held in the hand, Avalokitesvara) is perhaps the most impressive, perfectly realising the conception of one born by right of virtue to the enjoyment of all that the world can offer—and in this age the world could offer great things to an Indian Prince—and yet preoccupied with one ruling passion of compassion."[1].

In the paintings at Ajanta many figures depicted are devoid of anatomical faithfulness—like while presenting a queen or a lady-in-love, a king, a trader, or a merchant, the artist laid special emphasis on the character of their forms. A king is shown in all the regal grandeur that is becoming the status he holds; and these expressions have been concentrated in his features. Thus his feelings are held captive in each expressive feature. An artist in the process of meditation is capable of translating the formless into a form for his painting. The path by which he accomplishes this is Bhakti or devotion. In the final stages of deep concentration, the mind merges with the 'Absolute'[2], and the form of the deity is revealed in its

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1. Coomaraswamy A.K. History of Indian & Indonesian Art. London, 1926, page 99.
2. Refer "Highest Being", page 34.

posture, gesture and colour. Thus the form is conveyed from the depths of consciousness, and the artist paints these revealed deities in a manner, where the outer visible forms are in consonance with the inner mental image. The forms in nature and human life have been drawn in parallel, each seeking inspiration from the other. The various aspects of beauty in nature, like the twinkling of the stars in the sky, the moon-beam splitting the gloomy darkness of night, the fall of raindrops on parched earth, the swaying of green paddy fields, the golden beauty of the ripe corn, have inspired the Buddhist painters to the representation of all that human life offers in the form of youth, beauty, passion, love, emotion, pity and idealism. The treatment of hands reveal great tenderness, grace and rhythm; even the most idyllic scenes reveal the most fervent and selfless devotion.

The paintings decorating the walls of Ajanta caves present a complete expression, a mirror of thoughts, beliefs and ideals of Buddhist mysticism fully clothed and enveloped in the garb of nature. These rock-cut temples, built over a period of many years, breathe the very spirit and soul of the period, being a thousand years ahead of their time. The paintings of Ajanta caves present a vision of the living world; the earth decorated in nature's forms, the springing plants, the birds, the deer, the elephants, the crimson pillared pavillions and porticos, the arches, gateways and roof tops of cities in consonance with life of men, women and children, freely moving in nature's environment. The glory of Ajanta cave painting, in its grandeur has again been romantically represented by many modern Indian painters and its dynamic forms have left a lasting impression on their minds. These cave paintings have crossed all brariers of time.

IV

THE REVIVALISTS

Around the turn of the century, major Indian art movements viz: Mughal and Rajput styles were on the wane. At the same time, modern Indian painting was being born. The Indian thoughts and expressions had been suppressed for a long time, under foreign dominance, but now it was blossoming forth in myriad forms of creativity. This phenomenon is comparable to explosion in nature forced by under-currents.

The Revivalists were those painters, who revived India's past by popularising in paintings myths and legends, stories and heroic tales, Hindu faith and Buddhist beliefs of the golden period of Indian history. Paintings were executed depicting many episodes of Sanskrit plays of Kalidasa, scenes from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, etc.

It was Raja Ravi Varma who gave a new inspiration and revival to Indian art, when he chose to paint Indian mythological scenes and rural life in sentimental forms. At a time of renaissance in Bengal, when social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy were active and Shri Ram Krishna and Vivekananda were reviving the main thoughts of Vedic philosophy, Raja Ravi Varma ushered in an era of expression, where everything that was Indian in origin became an object of favour. Thus started an era of struggle for the revival of a lost ideology. The entry of Abanindranath Tagore on the horizon of art contributed to the recapturing of the great spiritual past of India. His approach was unique with fine brush lines as uniform and easy flowing as the strings of a sitar. The beautiful, pale, elaborate washes* and continuous free flowing lines, turning and twisting in the same intensity formed a picture of grace and rhythm, in the realistic depiction of the Hindu legends. The works were capable of stirring the viewer's emotion to a romantic and lyrical aura, peculiar to this style of painting. Ananda Coomaraswamy's noteworthy contribution at this stage was the criticism of the third-rate copies of Western art; his cry in this context changed the whole outlook of art. This revolt of art in the presentation of our heritage soon spread to other parts of the country.

Unlike the East, the Western hemisphere was actively organising a laborious process of eye-training, where artists were being trained to create life-like beauty of the objects represented in their paintings. This was in sharp contrast to the oriental practice of the development and exercise of the artist's creative powers, in the building up of compositions from memory, rather than through the retina's image. Abanindranath Tagore revived some of the fundamental concepts of Indian art: it was not necessary to paint the outer image as visible to the viewers--but to reveal the inner concepts of the soul, conceived only through a process of meditation. This representation was similar to the one followed in the caves of Ajanta. Inspite of the efforts by Abanindranath Tagore and his disciples, some

*Wash technique: Traditional Indian paintings were mostly in tempera finish, but Abanindranath Tagore started this unique style. In this technique, a drawing is first made in pencil on water-colour paper, which is then outlined with Burnt Sienna colour. After the application of transparent colours, the painting is immersed in water. It is taken out and allowed to dry, thus fixing the colours. Fresh colours are again applied and the process is repeated, until the desired effect is achieved. The aim of the wash is to give the painting a uniform colouring and subdued effect. Finishing can either be done with transparent or opaque colours. Sarada Ukil created excellent wash paintings on pure silk.

artists were blindly copying western trends, in the hope of being called modern. On the other hand, the Revivalists were claiming that art was becoming uglier and the subtle colours and soft highlights of Indian themes and compositions were fast diminishing. This can happen when you stand between two styles, not knowing the depths of either: then the expressions can become insipid, The opposite is also true: when an artist having studied both the styles, comes out with his or her own expressions, as did Amrita Sher-Gil. "On first glance many paintings may not seem Indian," she had once said, "but in the true sense of the term, their heart is very much Indian."

As we move down with the passing of time, we have the sensitive sadness of India's poverty-stricken humanity in the works of Amrita Sher-Gil. These works represented a side of Indian life, that could move the viewers to the realisation of beauty in humbleness, beauty in the heart and soul of rural life. While Gauguin painted the colourful, simple lives of the Tahitians, and Modigliani was fascinated by negro sculptures painted in elongated faces and nudes; Amrita Sher-Gil was bridging the gap between Europe and India, by painting in oils a sombre charm and native sadness. The bold flat colours and love for the Indian way of life sought a representation in her paintings. Her vivid and forceful strokes defied all that was termed as 'copied art'. She gave her figures a remarkable innocence and modesty; thus giving the Indian art movement the same freedom, which Gandhiji and Rabindra Nath Tagore were inspiring in the political and literary fields respectively. She even acknowledged the fact that India lived in the villages, in misery and poverty. It was very unfortunate that she was not understood by her contemporaries. The Indian villagers reminded her of the same Tahitian beauty painted by Gauguin. In sharp contrast to the lyrical quality of the paintings of Bengal School of Art, Amrita's paintings depicted dark brown angular bodies, silent faces with down-cast eyes, raised eye-brows, and unusually shaped large feet. We even find in her paintings a blending of the Orient and the Occident, in a simplified presentation of flat colours. Both the mystic and the spiritual qualities were drawn out in her works: the forms were stylised and devoid of all anatomical resemblances.

In the same aura as that of the Ajanta cave painters, Amrita's paintings concentrated more on characterisation of forms, rather than depicting mere photographic resemblance. We must realise that the dream of presenting luxury, glitter and glamour of urban life in paintings was over. It was the rural beauty which was in the minds and hearts of the artists. They were desirous of painting nature in its various moods; poverty stricken humanity, mud houses of the villages, beauty in the potter's earthenwares, folk toys in simple forms and bright vibrant singing colours, and the jingling silver ornaments of a village belle were now depicted. Artists were thus assimilating both the ugly and the beautiful, the rich and the poor, the good and the bad—all that was around them. The meaning of art had moved from narrow channels to a wider horizon, from the shallow to the deep, from the surface to the heart. It was spreading like wildfire.

We cannot ignore the historical fact, that in an age when Rabindra Nath Tagore[1] was reviving India's literary past and Gandhiji had launched the freedom struggle, an artist like Jamini Roy, inspired by the village crafts of Bengal, painted the dark Indian beauty with big almond-shaped eyes, protruding beyond the face. His simple forms and flat colours depicted many folk-lores and myths, using vegetable dyes and earth colours on inexpensive palm leaf mats. Jamini Roy, in sweeping outlines of his forms, ushered in an era of appreciation of the villages, which were

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1. Rabindra Nath Tagore's paintings of inhuman, fantastic shapes, goblins and landscapes (in texture and contrast) gave a wide field of play to the subconscious in harmony and balance. He moved a step further from where Abanindranath Tagore left in the field of paintings - an expression without a parallel.

the soul of Indian life. It is to be noted that while enveloping forms in broad dynamic outlines, the same rhythmical flavour was maintained as prevailed in the Ajanta cave paintings.

The paintings on crucifixion of Christ presented a picture of life's struggle for a worthy cause. Jamini Roy had brought out in Christ his gentle, noble and compassionate qualities, while alleviating the many sorrows of mankind in life's, drama. The predominant thoughts and concerns involved were parallel to the Jataka stories[2] in the Buddhist Ajanta caves. But the use of bright colours in Jamini Roy's paintings owes its inspiration to the folk toys and village crafts of Bengal.

On the other hand, Asit Kumar Haldar, Sudhir Khastgir, Sarada Ukil and others were also painting Indian themes; but an artist who used wide range of forms from Ajanta frescoes, South Indian bronzes and folk arts of Bengal—was no other than Nandalal Bose.[3]

He was the most illustrious disciple of Abanindranath Tagore and his paintings depicted a rejuvenation of Shantiniketan thoughts, a display of Indian motifs and designs. It is seldom that artists of his standing are born to paint for mankind. Abanindranath, as the leader of the Bengal School of painting, led to the widespread popularising of traditional works all over the country using the wash technique. The artists of the Bengal School of painting were basically sentimental in their approach; the anxiety to illustrate the contents led them to ignore the aspects of space, form and colour (their anaemic colours and melodious line drawing weakened the themes considerably). 'Lifeless, over-sentimentalised and spiritual figures,'' was Ananda Coomaraswamy's assessment of some of the works of the Bengal

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2. Refer page 36
3. Nandalal Bose's painting entitled 'Durga' (Goddess of destruction) depicted on the jacket cover.

School of Art. The representation in this style was an attempt to reveal the deep and profound philosophy and symbols of Hindu religion. However, in their efforts, the artists brought out only the superficial and fleeting glimpses of India's heritage, without an exhaustive study of their meaning. The Bengal school of painters attempted to paint some of the features of the cave painters of Ajanta, but they were unable to achieve all that they aimed at; even so the act was worth commending. No piece of art is flawless and no attempt completely satisfying either to the painter or to the viewer.

If we take such an attitude, then all pieces of art are worthy of recognition and all failures worthy of encouragement. It is not feasible to take a completely negative approach to the whole problem because the judgement of art must be unbiased and conscious of the environmental factors, which are its origin. The greatest contribution of the Revivalist movement was the awakening of national consciousness in the projection of thoughts and style. The narrow, orthodox sentimentalism and over-romantic gestures were an attempt to rescue Indian art (with a mighty past) from entering into oblivion. The efforts deserve to be commended, though the approach had its shortcomings.

V.

THE STYLISTS

The present 'Art styles' in Indian painting are the most controversial topics because they affect people actively involved in the field of art, as well as those outside its domain. Art knows no barriers and boundaries: it is universal in its appeal and free in its expression, encompassing all alike, with no distinction of caste, creed or religion. It is the only religion of its kind, with a following not limited to numbers or groups. Art may be compared to a seismograph, it records every little tremor of society. Thus art is the mirror of society. A change in society is revealed in art: it is the voice of the society, communicating through the hidden language of form, colour and line.

Sailoz Mukherjea came at a time when a wave of national awareness was gripping India. He removed from his paintings all decorative frills and presented the hard, naked truth. If his health had not failed him, Sailoz would have established some of the norms of the modern art movement. Nevertheless, his boldness made other artists also experiment with abstraction of forms; or drawing out the very essence of their expressions in paintings.

In the works of Sailoz, a painting can be described as the visual communication of a visual concept, in terms of colour. Now, most visual concepts are based on the memory of the appearance. The painting is no way imparts information about the outward looks, which are the camera's job. Sailoz's paintings, like any other work in the past, came into being as an affirmation of an inner necessity. Thus Sailoz, while painting, did not disregard the original concepts of Indian art. It was the same inner necessity, which made the Ajanta painters paint figures, disregarding all anatomical resemblance. After the turn of the century, it looked as if Sailoz was born to create modern art forms - but not by ignoring our heritage. He was more concerned with the inner image of objects, rather than its outer appearance. His every single stroke carried woes and pathos, which were his life partners. Thus Sailoz expressed the essence of his personality, the essence of his time and the essence of his period. Most of his observations were not accepted by the society, but if artists take criticism to heart, no work of art can be produced.

Other artists also faced enormous difficulties: the attainment of independence meant the building up of a strong nation and at the same time the artists had numerous other tasks to do. The focus from the stylised to the abstract forms in painting moved from Jamini Roy to Amrita Sher-Gil, Sailoz Mukherjea and, finally, to Husain.

The object was constructed in an ethical manner, defying all perspective, and colour was used for its own sake, applied flatly with an allusion to poetry. In M.F. Husain's painting, woman plays an important role and the background is treated as part of the painting, with complete omission of details. The objects are then juxtaposed in concrete reality and do not seem to be floating in space or vacuum. In the interplay of light and shade, folk symbols and geometric designs exist on one flat plane - each strengthening and enhancing the other.

The central focus or the pressure point of his painting is the intellect, caught in a web of stylised figures, distorted forms and subtle colours which intermingle with each other. Hands express a unique gesture in Husain's works, adorned with all the mystical markings like an Indian dance pose. The forms are derived through the process of meditation and built up in angular limbs and flat colours. His painting entitled 'Zameen'* is a powerful representation of many symbolic objects e.g., the bull, serpent, feet, hands etc., revealing the many diverse moods and manners, intellect and passion, moving viewers to joys and sorrows in the compassionate understanding of human drama.

Husain's art is both humane and expressive, conveying the message of the Eternal Being. He has revealed his many moods in contorted and distorted shapes. The message is further carried in his uncanny love for colours, mingling with human woes or laughter echoing through space. In this accomplishment, the artist has moved from the decorative to the basic, and from the realistic to a process of abstraction. The path that he has chosen is strewn with delusions and hurdles - only those survive who are close to nature (both in spirit and character) and possess a retentive eye not for the outer physical forms of objects, but its inner concepts. The expressive moods in his paintings are controlled by his jabbed or abruptly ending sure strokes, in the garb of mystic symbols.

Narayan Shridhar Bendre's quest for the real and indestructible has led him through an ardous journey of various styles, analyses and experimentation. The journey is filled with forms entwined with colours, and the artist moves on. The strokes become powerful, tearing apart sentimentality or emotions, to the realisation that all aspects of matter are transient.

Bendre remains a colourist, where each colour becomes the eternal depth in the void; yellow stands as the colour of sunshine and green colour signifies fertility. Even the warm colours e.g., reds and oranges (signifying anger, blood, etc.) have lost their 'acid touch' in a serenade of calmness, repose and ease. In Bendre's works the warm colours become cool in association with the 'passive blues' and the 'composed greens'. However, Bendre's forms creating a romantic atmosphere through colours are not exaggerated to the extent of losing their strength, but a delicate balance is maintained between sensitivity and righteousness, or between song and melody. The magic touch of his brush is neither harsh nor cruel to the decorativeness in art. And Bendre remains as one of the true masters of Indian creativeness, uniting expressiveness and colour, beauty and harmony, rhythm and poetry in the message of his soul for the joy of living.

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*Zameen' painting in the collection of National gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

While some artists were experimenting and questioning the modern Indian art movement, others like Erukula Kumaril Swamy were dipping their brushes in the tradition and glory of Shantiniketan. Here was an artist whose training and experience under Nandalal Bose yielded its own blossom, in a contemporary field of controversy and conflict, harmony and consonance; where each artist while asserting his individuality was representing his thoughts in a medium akin to his expression. Water colours, earth colours or dyes were used on a smooth or rough hand-made paper, providing the background for forms to manifest. These are some of the concepts of Kumaril Swamy's paintings, which were realised through a similar process of concentration as by our cave-painters. His paintings in wash technique[1] were the gift and teaching of a great Indian painter Sarada Ukil. Free action, free thoughts and free speech are the crystal reflections of Kumaril's mind, which developed under the blessings and guidance of Nandalal Bose at Shantiniketan.

Satish Gujral's inspiration, creativeness and expression has been his personal tragedy (the bitter struggle of the hurt and crushed ego of his soul, when he became totally deaf at the age of thirteen). Here is an artist expressing the anger of his tormented soul and a great surging sorrow that had cast a dark gloom in his life.

The medium that he chose for his expression varied form ceramics, terracottas, glass, bronze, aluminium and wood to the soul stirring controversial collages, enveloping the art field with a raging wildfire. The forms with the intuitive inspirations lashed the canvas in despair and conflict. The heavy glowing red colour displayed his anger, the black colour standing lonely in a depressive mood, wheroas the streaks of white and blue colour revealed his untiring patience. And the artist was rewarded in the final fulfilment, where his soul was no longer tormented by the irrational. His excitement was transferred to folk motifs, vibrating in uninhibited drawings, which were exquisite in details, swaying in rhythm and its lyrical quality challenged the domain of art.

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[1] Wash technique - refer page 40.

The various philosophies of Ajanta caves were coalesced in Gujral's paintings, preferring realism to stylisation, shaded areas to flat surfaces, and releasing the tension or fury of violent under-currents. Human forms became a pattern designed surface, in the struggle of the artist to assert himself and fight the darkness within his soul. The change in the artist's egotistical expression from the grotesque phase of chains, skulls, loneliness and haunted memories to the elated compositions (like the spirit of Ajanta caves) was almost divine. The flight from night into day, from pessimism to optimism, and the movement from the surface to the depth were some of the realities of life, religion and God.

A creative presentation where forms speak in the alphabet of language is the work of Narendra Srivastava. The stylised forms of the Devanagari* script, reveal the innate beauty-unheard, unspoken and unknown before. Each typescript is an order by itself and jointly represents the precise system of man's communicative tools in a language. A language may be defined as the verbal communication of thoughts feelings and intuitions of man, while the script becomes the written communication of language. Narendra has been inspired by the alphabet of language, which apart from conveying the verbal message carries a spiritual message. This unites man's inner feelings with the sancity of a verbal communication.

*Devanagari script is used in Hindi language.

The world of the subconscious in its image and fantasy has been treated by J. Sultan Ali. The drawings on paper of the bull, bird, fish and the illage maiden create an atmosphere of mystery. The designs using folk and traditional symbols take the form of either a monster (open mouthed and possessing unusually large teeth) with four eyes; or a village belle with a decorated water pitcher and wearing big ear-rings, a nose-ring and a stylish hair-do. Nature and man are treated in a composition of balance and harmony, but stylised to suit the play of his imagination. Sultan Ali takes his audience to another world of playful forms and his shapes soar high in the sky as elves or goblins, turning or twisting as if in a dream. Script forms reveal the mysterious universe of the subconscious. In this phantasy, reality merges into dreams, the usual into the unusual and conscious thoughts into unconscious. But these paintings have their roots firmly planted in the soil of Indian tradition, and its lines and forms emphasise the innated esigns of our heritage.

VI

THE FUTURE

Stars sparkling in the sky disperse night's gloom, illuminating both Heaven and Earth. Imagine a night devoid of these twinkling heavenly bodies. I would compare true and dedicated artists (who have displayed an unassuming love for art, inspite of many hurdles encountered in their way) to a galaxy of stars, radiating their light to countless creations. An artist who has worked unerringly at his work is like a star—ever-glowing, ever-lasting and ever-adored. A rising star and a creative artist "par excellence" have much in common.

Today, primitive man's scratchings on stone have changed to deeper and wider lines, covering the huge span of man's creativity beyond the visible horizons. And styles in art have not sprung from nothing, their romance has evolved from our heritage, which like a magnet keeps attracting true artists ; and this will, continue as long as men love Art. Indian artists having realised this subtle beauty of Art were drawing closer to it. When we feel we are nearing the goal, in reality the goal is further beyond. Even Michelangelo, said on his death bed, "I regret that I have not done enough for the salvation of my soul and that I am dying, just as I am beginning to learn the alphabet of my profession." With a heavy heart he wrote, "My children will be the works I leave behind. For even if they be of little value, they will last for a while."[1]

[1] Coughlan Robert. The world of Michelangelo (Editors of Time - Life Books), 1969, pages 92 and 195

Society has always been a great influence in the encouragement or discouragement of its artists to creativity. This led to the artist's expression in a new manner, and the end product was more important than the technique involved. The artists having realised their newly acquired freedom, experimented with all that was around them. And modern age gave birth to modern art.

"Each artist is not an isolated phenomenon. He is the logical outcome or the logical reaction of a long and many-sided process of aesthetic evolution. Every great artist has borrowed freely from the experience of his predecessors, but always striven for a new orientation of the principles of the old masters."[2] The artist's search today is the development of a new formal content, the re-orienting of traditional arts in a true representation of Indian culture and thought, with a hope of a new rationality towards the discovery of the self. This has been another bold step towards the freedom of an artist's expression, where the painting is not only a piece of paper in colour and line, but a piece of the artist's own self, enlivened to such standards of proficiency. One of the great sources of inspiration to mankind is a work of art—the conflict of an artist's ego and soul. Like other painters in the West, the Indian artists were also seeking something new; like a weary traveller on the road of life, searching for the immortality of man or that moment where Time stands still. Inspite of many hurdles, artists did not deviate from their path, although every artist differed in his style and approach.

Paintings are capable of being analysed by computers, thus facilitating duplications easily and exactly. The introduction of computer art is one of the many steps taken towards the realisation of the various forms and techniques in modern art. "In the present state of computer technology, a computer, on its own cannot create works of art; however, under the guidance of creative artists, sculptors, architects, poets and musicians, its artistic manifestations excel in technique, variety and complexity of forms and their amalgmation".[1] Even the computer is dependent on the human mind for creativity; thus the mind is the supreme source and battery of all mankind's knowledge.

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[2] Karl Khandalwala. Amrita Sher-Gil. Bombay, New Book Co. 1944, page 17.

Indian art comprising traditions and symbols, has always remained a paradox for many art interpreters. The apparent meaning has remained crystal clear, although the hidden truths had to be unveiled by a study of the way of life peculiar to this country. Indian life comprises exactly two opposite and contrasting aspects —the rural life, employing the primitive means of livelihood, and on the other hand mechanised industrial life of the urban group.

For art to flourish in such a contrasting medium, it has to acquire certain trends and traditions to cater to its varied audience. The world is changing so fast that, by the time you get accustomed to the present norms, they are old and outdated. The desire for new creations and consequently their expression through new techniques, make the artist active and always on the move—but never completely satisfied. An artist is never fully content with his creation, which in turn becomes an incentive for progress. It is this desire for a change in existing styles, improvement in expressions and experimenting with new techniques, that makes both the artist and the audience creative, the former in his work and the latter in their appreciation.

Whatever be the trend of modern art in India, it is the village where its heart still beats and the voices of her dead myriads can be heard. And art speaks for itself, the changes mean progress and come from the stimulation and not deadening of creative faculties, and from the upholding of higher ideals rather than the substitution of one academic formula for another.

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[1] National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, Catalogue. Computer Art. 1972 Page 7.

The Hindu view of life comprises the spirit of self-surrender in working without attachment to the fruits of achievement, and the realisation of the self, thus expressing the highest religious ideals in worthy aesthetic forms. The modern Indian art movement came up with this philosophy, as ancient art fused with modern technological thoughts. Indian artists have maintained the gossamer threads of past heritage in their works. Man has even gone back to the creation of myths and symbols, as in Husain's paintings. The whole art movement, varied, different and diffused, was aimed at representing 'Nature and Man' in search of the eternal truth. The language of arts turned for the better, when forms in prose moved to the forms of poetry. But here again the failure of the present world to solve mankind's problems led the artists to explore the inherited fortunes of the past.

Life had become more mysterious and had failed to satisfy the perturbed state of an artist's mind. The discontent grew deeper as technology advanced, and the artist resorted to a search within. The more he thought and formulated new ideas, the more dissatisfied and dejected he became. The only source of comfort and security for an artist was the abode of his past (the rock-cut caves of Ajanta). The painter thus departed from the language of experimentation to the tested formula, handed down by our ancestors (a remedy for all ills). New techniques, processes and materials had failed to quench his thirst.

Artists today need a substitute faith, as the forms and contents of paintings do not satisfy them. Life is fuller; art has gained new horizons; and the creative urge has pressed for explorations from the peripheral to the subliminal order. This awareness, emptiness and discontent have forced the artists to search for a meaning, a promise and a potential for re-establishing all that was lost or labelled as bygone into oblivion; to attempt those heights of glory, where the present fused with the past will aspire for conquering lost horizons of the future. Today the artist has become the philosopher and the researcher, involving the audience in a play of the visuals and finally moving them to the sensitiveness of the term "Arts". The artist asks nothing in return, while offering his soul's message to his admirers; except a deeper understanding of the many joys and sorrows, which echo through time.

Art's future prospects lie in the fields of experimentation and research in different colours and media. Tomorrow may also witness the spreading of Art to the masses and the widening of its audience (if the artists make an attempt to cater for them). If every man, woman and child on earth has some sort of appreciation and comprehension of the Arts, then at least one of the goals of Art would be fulfilled. A stronger correlation of Art with sciences would also be desirable, for we are living in a world of increasing scientific activity and beliefs. In this respect, a possible hurdle Art may have to cross could be the over-shadowing of it by science. It has been seen that the importance of Art today in life is not what it was a century ago. If this trend continues, could there be a decline in artistic activity, giving way to scientific activity? This is debatable and involves risky predictions because man is a very impredictable creature and questions concerning his behaviour and choice can only lead to shaky speculations. But, it is my sincere hope that the role which Art plays in the future will be more involved, constructive and dynamic, and that Art will rise without any falls.

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INDEX

A

Ajanta caves 29, 30, 34, 36, 37, 38, 42, 49, 54
Avalokitesvara 37

B

Bendre, Narayan Shridhar 47, 48
Bengal school of painting 43
Boddhisattva 37
Bose, Nandalal 34, 43, 48
Buddha—the compassionate, painting by E.K. Swamy Plate 1

C

Christ, Jesus 43
Computer art 52 53
Coomaraswamy, A.K. 37, 40, 43

D

Damru plate 12
Dasgupta, S.N. 34
Devanagari script 49
Durga 34, 43, Plate 18

E

Enlightened One 34

G

Gauguin, Paul 41
Greeks 33
Gujral, Satish 48, 49

H

Haldar, Asit Kumar 43
Highest Being 34

Humanity—painting by Narendra Srivastava Plate 2
Husain, M.F. 46, 47

J

Jatakas 36

K

Khandalwala, Karl 52
Khastgir, Sudhir 43

M

Michelangelo 51
Modigliani 41
Monkey God—painting by M.F. Husain Plate 17
Mukherjea, Sailoz 45, 46

N

Nirvana 37

P

Parthenon 36

R

Radhika — painting by J. Sultan Ali Plate 3
Revivalists 39
Rock-cut-caves 36
Roy, Jamini 42, 43
Roy, Raja Ram Mohan 39

S

Shantiniketan 48
Sher-Gil, Amrita 41, 42, 46, 52
Sivaramamurti, C. 9, 11
Srivastava, Narendra 49
Stella, Kramrisch 32
Sultan Alí, J. 50
Susruta 34
Stylists 45
Swamy, E.K. 48

T

Tagore, Abanindranath. 39, 40, 43
Tagore, Rabindra Nath. 29, 41, 42
Tahitian 41

U

Ukil, Sarada 48

V

Varma, Raja Ravi. 39
Vinci, Leonardo da 31
Vishnu—the Absolute 34

W

Wash technique 40

Z

Zameen 47
Zimmer, Heinrich 31, 36

5380

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MARWA M ALS

by

R. A. Agarawala

Foreword by

Padmashri Rai Krishna Dasa

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Marwar has had a long and chequered history of murals. But, curiously enough, these murals did not come to the notice of any arts critic so far. In this book is presented for the first time a detailed account of these murals and their place in Indian art.

After analysing the representative examples of these murals. Dr. Agarwala concludes that a distinctive school of mural painting sprang up in Marwar, which during the reign of Maharaja Takht Singh (1843-1873) reached the peak of maturity in places like Nagaur and Jodhpur in spite of Persian and other foreign influences these murals drew their strength and beauty from the genius of the place.

To convey a sense of their richness and subslety, Dr. Agarwala offers a close analysis of the style and technique of the murals and thinks that such an analysis is far more rewarding in art criticism than an analysis based on historical records, social accounts and cultural history. Nevertheless the murals have been examined against their backgrounds as well.

An indispensable book for anyone who wants to study the art of Marwar murals, Dr. Agarwala has enhanced the value of this book by reproducing a substantial selection of unpublished murals.

AGAM PRAKASHAN

DELHI